

SPINACH

Spinach is a hardy cool-season crop that is increasing in popularity as a salad green. It is easy to grow and well adapted in small garden areas. It will grow in spring or fall seasons, but hot days in late spring causes spinach plants to bolt or produce a seedstalk.



Varieties

Spinach varieties vary as to the degree of "crinkle" in the leaves--called savoy. An old, standard, heavily savoyed variety is Long

Standing Bloomsdale. Melody is a hybrid, semi- or slightly savoyed variety. Tyee is a type with smoother leaves. Smoother leaf types are easier to wash and clean if you have sandy soil that may get into the cracks and crevices of the leaves.

A plant referred to as "New Zealand spinach" is not related to spinach and is often called "hot weather spinach" because it grows best during the warm days of late spring. It is not planted until later in the season and is harvested for the young tender leaves that develop through late spring to early summer.

When to plant

Spinach can be planted very early since it is cold hardy. Mid- to late March is a common planting time. Fall spinach can be planted in mid-August to early September.

Spacing

Plant seeds about an inch apart in rows as close as 5-6 inches, or you can scatter seed uniformly about an inch apart in a wide row or bed planting. Because spinach germinates and grows early in the season, weed control is easier in this crop than in many planted this way.

Care

Spinach needs a fertile, well-drained location. Because production occurs early in the season, watering during stressful weather is not normally a concern. Additional nitrogen may be required to keep the spinach dark green and growing vigorously.

Harvesting

Clip spinach leaves as soon as they are big enough to use. If you clip individual leaves, the plant will continue to develop and produce more leaves. If you want to harvest mature plants, cut the plant at the soil level. This will be necessary as hot weather approaches. Fall-planted spinach will often overwinter; clip individual leaves for fall harvest but allow the plants to remain. Cover the planting with mulch in mid- to late November and uncover early in the spring.

You will usually get an additional early spring crop of spinach; however, this overwintered crop produces seedstalks early in the season. Store spinach in a plastic bag in a refrigerator for about a week.

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